

Budget 2021 – Impacts on young women

Impacts on young women overview

Young women have been leading the charge in calling for social and structural change on key issues - including in the national conversation on action to address and prevent sexual violence and the School Strike 4 Climate movement.

While there are some positive announcements in this budget, they do not meet the vision being put forward by young women. Additionally, long-standing issues of intergenerational equity and the specific implications of this budget on this issue needs to be seriously examined.

Many aspects of the budget impact on young women, including housing and homelessness, health, taxation, disability and social services policies. NFAW's analysis in this section focuses on some key areas: youth policy, employment, education and training, mental health, violence against young women, and climate change.

Youth policy

The Budget

The Women's Budget Statement does not provide specific analysis of the current experiences and needs of young women in Australia. The Statement includes very few references to young women in their own right (as opposed to young people generally). Where there are specific references, they are focused on young women building knowledge and skills to start their own businesses and create employment opportunities for themselves and for others (p. 44); the national HPV vaccination program (p. 74); health and physical activity (p. 75) and mental health services (p. 79).

There are no references in the budget papers to the [National Youth Policy Framework](#) (which was due to be delivered by the end of 2020) or any additional funding to support its implementation.

Gender implications

Why is this an issue for women?

Coordinated government policy for young Australians, in combination with gender responsive budgeting, is needed to ensure that young women are not left behind. This is particularly crucial given the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and recession on young women.

There are some foundations being built in relation to federal youth policy. A federal Minister for Youth was appointed in 2019, after having no Minister to lead government policy for young people since 2013. The national peak body, the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC), [received funding in late 2020](#) to support young people to participate in the National Youth Policy Project. Prior to this, the organisation had not received funding as a peak since 2013.

The diverse experiences and needs of young women must also be recognised and addressed through policies aiming to address gender inequality and improve the status of women. This is critical to ensure that gender inequalities are addressed across the life course.

What are the 2021 Budget impacts on women?

There is no specific funding commitment in this budget to support implementation of the National Youth Policy Framework.

The Women's Budget Statement, while a positive step, does not describe or engage with the deep structural inequalities that young women experience. This is particularly critical in light of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on this cohort. In future iterations, this Budget Statement must engage more deeply with the experiences of women across the life course to identify differential impacts of policies and budget commitments.

Recommendations

- Commit to funding to support the whole-of-government National Youth Policy Framework and measures that will support structural change to issues affecting young women's education, economic security, employment, health and safety.
- Provide ongoing funding for the national peak body for young people to support national youth policy.
- Integrate a youth lens into gender analysis of budget measures.

Key budget initiatives for young people

The Budget

The Government [has identified](#) key budget commitments which support young people. These include:

- Jobs and training – including extending and expanding support for apprenticeship commencements; expanding the JobTrainer Fund; and expanding the Transition to Work program to help disadvantaged young people aged 15-24 make the transition to work or further studies
- Youth mental health – enhancing and expanding youth mental health services; supporting ReachOut for Online Youth Mental Health Services; and improving the treatment of eating disorders.

For further detail and analysis on budget measures relating to these policy areas, see the relevant sections of the Gender Lens on the Budget.

Gender implications

Why is this an issue for women?

YWCA Australia reports that under 35s are account for almost 80% of jobs lost in the past year and more than 200,000 under 25s have been out of work for more than six months. Young women have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic due to the types of work that they were engaged in. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, young women were already facing significant barriers to secure employment and financial security. The casualisation of the workforce, high rates of under-employment and unemployment, increase in the gig economy and increasing unpaid internships make it difficult for young people to find steady, secure employment with access to paid leave and superannuation. Young workers aged 15 to 24 years are much more likely to be casual workers than other age groups, and therefore not have access to leave entitlements and lack job security. Additionally, young women are disadvantaged by the gender pay gap from the beginning of their working lives.

Despite high rates of participation in post-secondary education, young women continue to experience inequity in pay. Because of this, Australia's highly gender segregated workforce, low remuneration in feminised industries, and increasing study costs are of great concern to young women when making decisions and participating in education and training. A gender lens, including a specific focus on young women, is necessary in education and training funding policy and planning.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, young women were already twice as likely as young men to be experiencing psychological distress (30 per cent compared to 16 per cent). Data from the Monash Alfred Psychiatry research centre shows that the highest rate of suicidal thoughts among adults participating in data collection between 3 April and 3 May 2020 were among young women aged 18-24 with 37 per cent of women in this age group reporting suicidal thoughts, compared to 17 per cent of men. Research shows that in 2020 young people were feeling anxious, uncertain and scared about the crisis, and young women reported specific concerns around their education and the health of their family. Concerningly, there is evidence that these psychological responses to the crisis may last long after the immediate threat of COVID-19 passes.

What are the 2021 Budget impacts on women?

Employment: The extension of the Transition to Work program providing specialist youth employment services (for young people aged 15 to 24) is welcomed. In response to this funding, the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria have identified the importance of the Government “meaningfully engaging young people in designing the new model to ensure that it properly supports young people looking for work”. Consideration must be given to appropriate supports young women who are un- or under-employed – the additional funds committed to ensure compliance with tougher mutual obligations are not an appropriate support and ACOSS identifies

will likely place emphasis on ticking a box than positive support to secure meaningful employment.

Education and training: Expansion of the JobTrainer Fund is positive - the Women's Budget Statement indicates that women represent 56% of enrolments, and inclusion of young people is a key focus. Further disaggregated data is needed to understand if young women are benefitting from this scheme. The Australian apprenticeships incentives program is a key education and training initiative funded in the budget. Further consideration of the gendered implications of the program, and efforts to both attract and retain young women to apprenticeships. Universities have taken significant revenue hits due to the COVID-19 pandemic which has impacts on young women seeking to or currently studying as well as young women working in higher education. The budget fails to address these circumstances by investing in the sustainability of universities, including their research agenda. For young women working in universities in all capacities including early career researchers, as well as postgraduate students employed in teaching and reaching and/or wanting to pursue an academic career, there are significant concerns about opportunities for secure employment and career progression.

Mental health: Funding to enhance and expand youth mental health services is positive. To support the mental health and wellbeing of young women, it is important that mental health initiatives target and engage them in ways that work for this cohort. Further data will be needed to monitor young women's access to mental health services as a result of these budget measures. Government needs to invest in the social determinants of mental health in addition to its budget measures – this includes housing, social security, job creation, violence prevention, and structural reform to address discrimination on the basis of gender and intersecting inequalities which has significant impacts on young women's mental health.

Recommendations

- Develop a long-term plan for youth employment as part of the National Youth Policy Framework, with an ongoing focus and strategy from government on job creation, including in female-dominated industries, and measures to address workforce gender segregation.
- As part of gender-responsive budgeting, undertake analysis on education and training policies and commitments to identify specific impacts and implications for young women.
- Given the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and impacts on young women, gender should be recognised and centred as a social determinant of mental health, and effective gender sensitive approaches to youth mental health should be developed in consultation with women's health organisations.

Violence against young women

The Budget

The Government has committed \$1.1 billion to addressing and preventing violence against women. This includes funding for frontline services, reforms and programs in the family law

system, improving data collection and monitoring, and implementing the Government's response to the *Respect@Work* report.

Commitments in the funding package which have a specific focus on young women include:

- \$10.7 million over 4 years for additional education resources for young Australians about respectful relationships (Budget Paper No. 2, p. 84, 2021). This is also described as investing in new programs to better inform young Australians about consent and respectful relationships (Women's Budget Statement, pp. 22-23, 2021).
- \$3 million over 2 years for eSafety including to develop and implement a new program of resources, training and technology-based tools for children, young people, frontline domestic violence workers and child welfare officers (Women's Budget Statement, p. 33, 2021).

See the violence against women and Respect@Work sections of the Gender Lens for more detail.

Gender implications

Why is this an issue for women?

In Australia, women aged 18 to 24 are at the highest risk of experiencing sexual violence compared to women in older age groups and men. Data from the [ABS Personal Safety Survey](#) found that approximately 1 in 20 women in this age group reported experiencing sexual assault in the last 12 months. [Research has shown](#) that 24 per cent of young women aged 18-24 have had a nude or sexual photo/video posted online or sent on without their consent.

A [recent petition](#) has highlighted the urgent issue of sexual violence experienced by adolescent girls and young women and the need for schools and the education system to act to prevent this violence through holistic sexuality education and school culture reforms.

Workplace sexual harassment is a significant issue for young people. 53 per cent of women aged 18-29 years, [have experienced](#) workplace sexual harassment. The national inquiry into sexual harassment in Australian workplaces found that young people aged between 18 and 29 were more likely than those in other age groups to have experienced sexual harassment in the last five years, and that young women were significantly more likely than young men to have been sexually harassed. These high rates are influenced by workplace power imbalances and the higher likelihood that young people are employed on a casual basis; experiences of sexual harassment by young women are compounded by their lower awareness of workplace rights and access to support.

What are the 2021 Budget impacts on women?

The investment in addressing violence against women in this budget is welcomed as part of the transition to the next National Plan, however much further investment and reform is needed to truly transform the systems that respond to violence and its underlying drivers. Young women are calling for significant reforms in this area and these calls must be heard and acted on in the development of a second National Plan.

Noting the commitments in this budget for prevention programs for young people, greater funds are needed to invest in preventing violence against women across society. A focus primarily on young people is not sufficient and does not recognise the substantial work that young women are already doing to raise awareness and create change to prevent gender-based violence. These investments must be targeted at changes at all levels of society, not only at the individual level, and reach the whole population. Prevention initiatives engaging young people must be co-designed by them to ensure relevance and efficacy.

Recommendations

- Embed co-development processes for prevention initiatives which focus on engaging young people.

Climate change

The Budget

See the Climate Change and Energy section of the Gender Lens for detailed information about relevant budget measures.

Gender implications

Why is this an issue for women?

The 2020 [Climate of the Nation](#) report found that younger respondents (aged 18-34) are more concerned about climate change and supportive of actions to reduce emissions. This includes being more concerned about climate change, more supportive of a national target for net zero emissions by 2050, and more likely to agree that Australian governments should plan to phase out coal mining and transition to other industries. Another [Australian study](#) found that young women are much more likely to care about climate change than young men.

As identified by [Plan International](#) “the global climate movement is being powered by girl activists, yet national climate strategies barely consider their rights”. The [School Strike 4 Climate](#) has mobilized school students across the country to campaign for climate change to be treated as a crisis and key actions taken by governments. In many cases, young women and girls have been at the forefront of this movement.

The impacts of climate change will disproportionately impact women, for example with relation to [health](#). Plan International [has recognised](#) there are serious implications from climate change for the rights of girls, especially adolescent girls.

What are the 2021 Budget impacts on women?

As noted in the more detailed section on this topic in the Gender Lens, this budget is a missed opportunity to accelerate action on climate change. This shows that the Government is not listening to the voices of young people, often led by young women, who are calling for urgent actions to address this crisis.

Further delays in taking critical actions to ameliorate the impacts of climate change and reduce emissions will have impacts on young women and girls now and into the future.